

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3400

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT IS LE
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: FORMULA FOR TROUBLE

1. SUMMARY: GOL SHOWS DISINTEREST IN CEASE-FIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON, WHILE RIGHTIST CHRISTIANS AND SOME MOSLEMS HOPE FOR ISRAELI INTERVENTION. ISRAELIS BEGINNING TO MAKE NOISES ABOUT PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH AND THERE IS INCREASED ISRAELI-CHRISTIAN COUNTER ACTIVITY ALONG BORDER. ISRAELIS HAVE COMMITTED SELVES TO SUPPORT OF CLIENTS WHOSE BEHAVIOR THEY DO NOT FULLY CONTROL. SITUATION REMAINS DANGEROUS, AND WE HOPE IT WILL BE SUBJECT OF TALKS BETWEEN PRESIDENTS BEGIN AND CARTER. END SUMMARY.

2. IN OUR JULY 7 CONVERSATION REPORTED SEPARATELY FONMIN BOUTROS REVEALED CONSIDERABLE LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE SOUTH LEBANON CEASE-FIRE PROPOSAL HE HIMSELF HAD PUT FORWARD TWO WEEKS EARLIER (BEIRUT 3028). HE REPORTEDLY EVEN ASKED THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF TO PROVIDE HIM WITH THE RATIONALE FOR NOT REPEAT NOT SENDING
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LEBANESE TROOPS TO THE SOUTH. WE UNDERSTAND GEN. KHOURY HIMSELF FEELS THAT TO DO SO UNDER A CEASE-FIRE AT THIS STAGE WOULD BE DISASTROUS BECAUSE THE ARMY IS NOT READY AND INEVITABLE INCIDENTS WOULD HAVE DIVISIVE EFFECT AS THEY PITTED CHRISTIAN AGAINST MOSLEM.

3. BOUTROS' UNENTHUSIASM IS ECHOED IN SPADES BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN

AND PIERRE GEMAYEL, ALTHOUGH FORMER HAS RECENTLY COME OUT IN FAVOR OF A UN FORCE ON BORDER. AT THIS POINT PALESTINIANS LOOK LIKE ONLY PARTY SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN TRYING TO ARRANGE SOMETHING (SEE OUR 3398), ALTHOUGH BOUTROS MAY COME BACK FROM DAMASCUS WITH NEW INSPIRATION.

4. CHAMOUN'S ATTITUDE REFLECTS CONTINUING CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST HOPE THAT ISRAELIS WILL SOLVE PROBLEM FOR THEM BY CLEANING OUT PALESTINIANS, EVEN AT RISK OF SETTING OFF AREA CONFLAGRATION IN PROCESS. THE CONCEPT THAT WAR SOLVES NOTHING DOES NOT APPEAR WEIGH HEAVILY WITH THOSE MARONITES WHO ARE INCREASINGLY IMPATIENT WITH THE LOCAL STALEMATE AND WANT AT ALL COSTS TO BREAK THE PALESTINIANS' HEADS, OR RENDER THEM INNOCUOUS. THEY APPARENTLY FEEL THAT AT WORST THEY WILL EMERGE WITH AN AUTONOMOUS OR INDEPENDENT MT. LEBANON, CLOSELY SUPPORTED BY ISRAEL AND EVENTUALLY THE U.S.

5. NO ONE IS SPEAKING PUBLICLY IN THESE TERMS, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT MUCH OF THE SPECULATION ABOUT ISRAELI INTENTIONS IS IN FACT WISHFUL THINKING, AND IT IS NOT JUST THE MARONITES WHO FEEL THAT WAY. SOME OF THE LANDED SHIA OF THE SOUTH, E.G. KAZEM KHALIL, HAVE BEEN SPEAKING IN THESE TERMS FOR MONTHS (KHALIL REITERATED THEM TO ME ON JULY 7) AND ONE SENSES THAT EVEN THE SUNNIS AND PERHAPS SOME RIGHTIST PALESTINIANS WOULD NOT MIND ALL THAT MUCH IF THE ISRAELIS POLICED THE REJECTIONISTS.

6. IN THIS ATMOSPHERE WE REGARD AS POTENTIALLY OMINOUS THE INDICENT

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CATIONS WE ARE BEGINNING TO SEE OF INCREASING ISRAELI ACTIVITY IN THE AREA. PARA 5 OF TEL AVIV'S 5047, FOR INSTANCE, REPORTS THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT LONG-TERM STABILITY OF SOUTH LEBANON. THAT CONCERN IS PERHAPS REFLECTED IN INCREASED ISRAELI-CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY ON WESTERN SLOPES OF MT. HERMON AS WELL AS NEAR COAST, AND BY VISIT OF GEN. WEIZMANN SEVERAL KILOMETERS INSIDE LEBANON. (HIS UNCONCERN FOR LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY MAKES HIM ONE WITH HIS ARAB COUSINS IN TREATING LEBANON AS A PUBLIC CONVENIENCE.)

7. ALTHOUGH WE ARE TAKING ISRAELI ASSURANCES THAT THEY HAVE NO TERRITORIAL ASPIRATIONS AT FACE VALUE, THEY SEEM TO WANT TO HAVE THEIR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO. LEBANON HAS NO ARMY. IT WILL HAVE NO ARMED FORCE CAPABLE OF DOING ANYTHING IN THE SOUTH FOR ANOTHER YEAR. THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF THEIR BRINGING THE PALESTINIANS UNDER CONTROL EVEN THEN WITHOUT MORE SUPPORT THEN ARAB BROTHERS HAVE GIVEN TO DATE, THE ONE REMEDY AT HAND, THE SYRIAN TROOPS, HAVING BEEN REJECTED BY THE ISRAELIS.

8. FURTHERMORE, LIKE EVERYONE WHO ADOPTS A CLIENT, THE ISRAELIS LOSE SOME FREEDOM OF ACTION IN THE PROCESS. THEY SAY WITH EVIDENT SINCERITY, THAT THEY ARE OBLIGED TO PROTECT THE CHRISTIANS OF

LEBANON. THEIR RADIO GIVES THE IMPRESSION THEY MEAN ALL CHRISTIANS, AND NOT JUST THOSE IN THE SOUTH. THE LATTER ARE DEPENDENT ON THEM FOR ARMS, AMMUNITIOYBN ARTILLERY SUPPORT, AND EVEN MAN-POWER AT TIMES. THE ISRAELIS HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO RESPOND WHEN THE CHRISTIANS ARE IN DANGER, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE FULL CONTROL OVER THE LATTER'S ACTIONS. IT IS POSSIBLE TO VISUALIZE A SCENARIO IN WHICH THE CHRISTIANS PROVOKE THE PALESTINIANS INTO ACTIONS TO WHICH THE ISRAELIS MUST RESPOND, AND THAT RESPONSE WILL LEAD TO COUNTER RESPONSE AND SO ON UNTIL THERE IS "A WORSENING OF THE SOUTHERN LEBANON SITUATION WHICH ADVERSELY AFFECTS ISRAELI SECURITY." THEN THE ISRAELIS MOUNT, SAY, A LIGHTNING RAID OF THE SORT THEY PRACTICED AGAINST EGYPT DURING THE WAR OF ATTRITION IN THE LATE 60'S, AND WE ARE OFF TO THE RACES.

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9. THE SOUTH IS A FESTERING SORE THAT WILL NOT HEAL WITHOUT AN ENERGETIC APPLICATION OF ANTI-BIOTICS OR SURGERY. AT THIS POINT IT IS ISOLATED TO SOME EXTENT BY ITS REMOTENESS FROM BEIRUT, AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SYRIAN FORCES BETWEEN HERE AND THERE, WHICH KEEP IT WITHIN LIMITS. IT IS UNDER THE FULL CONTROL OF NO ONE, HOWEVER, AND IT IS ONE OF TWO INSOLUBLE PROBLEMS, BOTH RELATED TO THE PALESTINIANS, WHICH ARE A DOUBLE MILLSTONE AROUND THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S NECK.

10. I HOPE THERE IS INDEED A THOROUGH DISCUSSION OF THIS PROBLEM BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND BEGIN. MAY GOD GIVE THEM STRENGTH.

PARKER

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